



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

LITTLE DUNMOW



Location: 2 miles east of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square** TL6521.
Postcode CM6 3HT. **Access:** B1417. National Cycle Route 16 (Flitch Way). Bus 133
Colchester-Braintree-Stansted (www.sxconnect.co.uk)
County: Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 284 in 2011.



The small mid-Essex parish of Little Dunmow lies close by its larger namesake Great Dunmow in the vale of the Chelmer River on its northern bank. There was a settlement here at least as early as Roman times; indeed, much of what remains of the Roman road Stane Street bisects the parish west to east and has been incorporated into what is now the route of the A120. At the time of its recording in the Domesday Book it was known as Dommawa, and the

earliest architectural remains would appear to be parts of the Priory Church of St Mary the Virgin.



The Priory at Little Dunmow was founded in 1106 by the Lord of the Manor Geoffrey Baynard and survived until its demolition after the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536. All that remains is the Lady Chapel, which now serves as the parish church. There are points of interest from every century in this long, unusually narrow church, both in architecture and artefact: magnificent pillars and windows, font, piscina and the curious graffiti of past centuries around the main doorway and on the columns, one of which in Latin declares "A short life and a merry one!" – an intriguing contribution which sets the imagination

wondering. The church was renovated in the 1870s by the architect and first mayor of Chelmsford, Frederic Chancellor. A turret was added at this time on the pier of a former tower, which some commentators feel is an unfortunate anachronism.

Not least among the items of local interest are artefacts relating to the historic Dunmow Flitch ceremony. This well-known event dates from the 12th century, has lapsed from time to time, was revived and has been held every leap year since the Second World War in the adjacent parish of Great Dunmow. The Dunmow Flitch is a side of bacon awarded to married couples who can convince a counsel and a jury of six maidens and six bachelors that they have lived without quarrel or regret for at least a year and a day. The website below will explain all. On the north wall of the parish church are photographic copies of records of the Courts Baron which awarded the Flitch in the 1750s. In the chancel of the church is the Prior's Chair, now more commonly known as the Flitch Chair, a throne of 13th-century oak which was used to seat the winning couple. A replica is now used for modern ceremonies. Of even greater curiosity are the Flitch 'kneeling stones', shown here. The winning couple are required to take their oath kneeling on these pointed stones; one can only imagine why. Perhaps the obvious discomfort was designed as a final test of the couple's merit.





The church is far from being the only listed building in Little Dunmow. There are 45, almost half of which date from the 17th century, and a significant number from the 14th. All but the church (Grade I) are listed as Grade II. Many are thatched and all appear beautifully maintained, at least to the visitor's eye. It is good to see not just the ancient, but the more modern too. The village pump is 19th-century and in its own colourful way as evocative of times past as any of the timbered buildings.



A focal point in the village is the 17th-century Flitch of Bacon. One wonders how many Flitch ceremonies this pub has seen across the years? Before recent renovation, a sign over the door read:

*Painted in gold ye Flitch behold
of famed Dunmow ye boaste
Then here should call fond couples all
and pledge it in a toast.*

The Flitch of Bacon is now a restaurant and pub with rooms offering lunches, evening meals and accommodation.



The pub is a good stopping-off point for those enjoying the many walks in the parish. The Flitch Way is a 15-mile walk which runs right through the parish between Bishop's Stortford and Braintree and follows the route of the old single-track railway which survived for exactly a century, from 1869 to 1969. A helpful pictorial leaflet can be downloaded from the website below. Walkers can traverse the whole route; those on cycle or horse-back will be limited to certain sections only. Those wanting a shorter walk could try the appropriately named 'Bringing Home the Bacon' walk from the AA website (see below). This is a 4-mile circular route which touches on parts of the Flitch Way but which

will bring you helpfully back to where you started. Whether you choose a formal route or a random stroll, from a starting point in the village you will find a signpost and a footpath at almost every turn. There is much to explore in Little Dunmow.

Hospitality:

Flitch of Bacon: The Street, CM6 3HT. 01371 821660. <http://flitchofbacon.co.uk>

Blatches Farm B&B: Braintree Road, CM6 3AL. 01371 856770. www.blatchesfarm.com

Adjacent parishes: Barnston, Great Dunmow, Stebbing, Felsted, Flitch Green.

Links:

Parish Council: www.essexinfo.net/little-dunmow-parish-council

History: www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/Little%20Dunmow/ldunmowhome.html

Little Dunmow Conservation Area Appraisal: www.uttlesford.gov.uk/caa

Dunmow Flitch Trials: www.dunmowflitchtrials.co.uk

The Flitch Way leaflet: <http://www.visitessex.com/what-to-do/flitch-way.aspx>

The AA: www.theaa.com/walks/bringing-home-the-bacon-at-little-dunmow

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